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ABSTRACT

This study examined differences in final course grades for campus-based and distance education students at Nova Southeastern University (Florida). Data on over 26,000 course grades for winter term 1997 were obtained from university records. It was found that students enrolled in courses offered through distance education received a significantly greater frequency of successful grades (A, B, C, or Pass) than their campus-based counterparts enrolled in the undergraduate studies program, the School of Education and Human Services, and the School of Business and Entrepreneurship. However, in the Center for Psychological Studies, there was no significant difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses and courses offered through distance education. For courses taught by faculty who concurrently taught the same course to campus-based students and distance education students, there was no significant difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses and courses offered through distance education. An appendix contains 9 references and 4 tables. (MDM)

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ED 429 476

A COMPARISON OF FINAL GRADES IN COURSES WHEN FACULTY CONCURRENTLY TAUGHT THE SAME COURSE TO CAMPUS-BASED STUDENTS AND DISTANCE EDUCATION STUDENTS: WINTER TERM 1997

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Nova Southeastern University
Research and Planning

Report 98-15

December 1998

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Research and Planning provided the first comprehensive analysis of grades at Nova Southeastern University in 1996. Because of the way data were organized, it was not possible at that time to report grades based on place of class instruction (on-campus and off-campus).

Since then, Research and Planning has reported on grades in standard courses by place of class instruction for the four academic centers with distance education instruction (Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies, Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services, School of Business and Entrepreneurship, and Center for Psychological Studies):

- By focusing on grades awarded only in standard courses, grades in non-standard courses (practicum, thesis, dissertation, Major Applied Research Project, rotation, etc.) were excluded from all analyses.

- Guidelines established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools were used to provide an operational definition of campus-based and distance education:

    - All instruction offered in either Broward County or Miami-Dade County was considered campus-based instruction.

    - All instruction offered at other locations was considered instruction offered through the use of distance education.

Using an extract file for all Winter Term 1997 courses offered by the University, grades of campus-based students and distance education students were examined from a variety of perspectives:

- At the broadest level, it was determined that there was a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades awarded in courses offered through distance education compared to the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses. This finding was upheld in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies, the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services, and the School of Business and Entrepreneurship. However, in the Center for Psychological Studies, there was no statistically significant difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses and courses offered through distance education.

- Breakout analyses for broadly representative core courses were also prepared. Of the 15 core courses identified by staff in the four academic centers, distance education students were in full parity with campus-based students in

terms of the relative frequency of successful grades received. For 3 of the 15 courses, distance education students received a greater frequency of successful grades than their on-campus counterparts ($p \leq .05$).

There were no instances where campus-based students received a greater frequency of successful grades than off-campus students ($p \leq .05$).

The purpose of this study was to once again use the Winter Term 1997 extract file to answer the following research question: "For teachers who concurrently taught the same course to campus-based students and distance education students, is there any difference in the frequency of successful grades received by these two groups of students?" For all four centers, there was no statistically significant difference ($p \leq .05$). That is to say, distance education students were in parity with their campus-based counterparts in terms of the frequency of successful grades in courses taught by teachers who concurrently taught the same course to both groups of students.

There is currently only a minimal amount of professional literature devoted to this topic. However, of the literature that is available, the general observation is that students who are enrolled in distance education programs are by no means at a disadvantage, compared to campus-based students, in terms of grades and learning outcomes. Of course, far more research needs to be devoted to this topic to gain a better understanding of the many possible impacts of distance education. There seems to be some degree of consensus that distance education students have higher levels of motivation than their often younger campus-based peers, thus bringing issues related to adult education into this area.

To develop a better understanding of learning outcomes comparing campus-based students and distance education students, this study offered the recommendation that the University should provide some type of standardized assessment in selected courses that are offered in both formats. Then, it would be possible to empirically determine achievement of campus-based students and distance education students on an equivalent examination or other common assessment instrument.

It may also be useful for the University to offer some sense of how distance education students are able to equal and often exceed campus-based students in terms of grades. Clearly, issues related to access to campus-resident services and resources does not hinder the academic performance of the University's distance education students.

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Office of Research and Planning provided the first comprehensive analysis of grades at Nova Southeastern University in 1996 (*Grades at Nova Southeastern University: Fall Term 1993, Fall Term 1994, and Fall Term 1995*; 1996). A limitation of that report was that grades could only be reported by academic center and not by place of class instruction (on-campus and off-campus).

Since then, Research and Planning has reported on grades in standard courses by place of class instruction for the four academic centers (Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies, Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services, School of Business and Entrepreneurship, and Center for Psychological Studies) with distance education instruction:

- By focusing on grades awarded only in standard courses, grades in non-standard courses (practicum, thesis, dissertation, Major Applied Research Project, rotation, etc.) were excluded from all analyses.
- Guidelines established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools were used to provide an operational definition of campus-based and distance education:
  - All instruction offered in either Broward County or Miami-Dade County was considered campus-based instruction.
  - All instruction offered at other locations was considered instruction offered through the use of distance education.

Using an extract file for all Winter Term 1997 courses offered by the University, grades of campus-based students and distance education students were examined from a variety of perspectives:

- At the broadest level, it was determined that there was a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades awarded in courses offered through distance education compared to the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses (*A Comparison of Final Grades Awarded in Campus-Based Courses and Courses Offered Through Distance Education for Winter Term 1997*, 1998). This finding was upheld in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies, the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services, and the School of Business and Entrepreneurship. However, in the Center for Psychological Studies, there was no statistically significant

difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses and courses offered through distance education.

- Breakout analyses for broadly representative core courses were also prepared (*An Analysis of Final Grades for Selected Courses in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies: Differences Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students*, 1998; *An Analysis of Final Grades for Selected Courses in the Center for Psychological Studies: Differences Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students*, 1998; *An Analysis of Final Grades for Selected Courses in the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services: Differences Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students*, 1998; *An Analysis of Final Grades for Selected Courses in the School of Business and Entrepreneurship: Differences Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students*, 1998). Of the 15 core courses identified by staff in the four academic centers, distance education students were in full parity with campus-based students in terms of the relative frequency of successful grades received. For 3 of the 15 courses, distance education students received a greater frequency of successful grades than their on-campus counterparts ($p \leq .05$).

  There were no instances where campus-based students received a greater frequency of successful grades than off-campus students ($p \leq .05$).

- Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study was to once again use the Winter Term 1997 extract file to answer the following research question: "For teachers who concurrently taught the same course to campus-based students and distance education students, is there any difference in the frequency of successful grades received by these two groups of students?" This question did not consider teaching modality but instead merely focused on place of class attendance: campus-based class attendance or off-campus class attendance through the use of some type of distance education modality.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for *Grades at Nova Southeastern University: Fall Term 1993, Fall Term 1994, and Fall Term 1995* (1996) was quite useful and this report in many ways replicates that prior study:

1. The computing center provided the original extract file on November 11, 1997.

   This date provided an approximate four month interim from the end of Winter Term 1997 and the creation of the extract file, allowing sufficient time for adjustment to most *Incomplete* grades and the posting of any late grades.

2. The extract file was purposely prepared so that the five column *Cluster_City* code for each course was identified, allowing for later discrimination between campus-based instruction and instruction offered through distance education.

3. Center catalogs were used for information on standard courses and non-standard courses.

4. The graduate assistant assigned to Research and Planning hand-entered the appropriate *Course_Type* code for each of the more than 9,000 unique course listings identified in the extract file.

5. Grades in non-standard courses (practicum, thesis, dissertation, Major Applied Research Project, rotation, etc.) have been excluded from this report.

   Grades were organized for the four academic centers with off-campus instruction into two separate categories:

   - Successful grades (A, B, C, and Pass)
   - All other grades

6. A listing of all standard courses was prepared in sorted order by *Faculty_Name* and the *Cluster_City* code was used to identify faculty who concurrently taught the same course to campus-based students and distance education students.

The chi-square test was then used to determine if there were differences in the frequency of successful grades awarded to campus-based students and distance education students.

RESULTS

A summary of successful grades and all other grades by place of class location for the four academic centers with off-campus instruction is provided in Table 1. When viewing grades in all standard courses for an entire academic term, it was determined that there was a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades awarded in courses offered through distance education compared to the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses (Tables 2.A to 2.E).

This finding was upheld in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies (Table 2.A), the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services (Table 2.B), and the School of Business and Entrepreneurship (Table 2.C). However, in the Center for Psychological Studies (Table 2.D), there was no statistical difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses and courses offered through distance education.

However, for courses taught by faculty who concurrently taught the same course to campus-based students and distance education students, there was no difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded (Tables 3.A to 4). For all four academic centers, distance education students were in parity with their campus-based counterparts in terms of the frequency of successful grades received from faculty who concurrently taught the same course to both sets of students.

SUMMARY

Throughout the many broad and breakout analyses of the Winter Term 1997 data set, distance education students have consistently been in parity with campus-based students in terms of the relative frequency of successful grades awarded. This study further reinforces the notion that distance education students are by no means less successful than campus-based students when concurrently enrolled in the same course taught by the same teacher.

Going beyond the observation of parity between distance education students and campus-based students, Research and Planning further identified that off-campus students had higher scores on a common final examination than their campus-based counterparts (*A Comparison Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students to a Common Final Examination*, 1996). It was later determined that there was a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades awarded in courses offered through distance education compared to the frequency of successful grades awarded in campus-based courses (*A Comparison of Final Grades Awarded in Campus-Based Courses and Courses Offered Through Distance Education for Winter Term 1997*, 1998).

Koch (1998, p. A60) also addressed the issue of parity in grades and stated that "[ ] both male and female distance-learning students earned higher grades than did students in conventional versions of the same courses." Hogan (1997) also determined that distance education students had higher grades than the grades of students enrolled in traditional courses.

To develop a better understanding of learning outcomes comparing campus-based students and distance education students, it may be useful for the University to provide some type of standardized assessment in selected courses that are offered in both formats. Then, it would be possible to empirically determine achievement of campus-based students and distance education students on an equivalent examination or other common assessment instrument.

It may also be useful for the University to offer some sense of how distance education students are able to equal and often exceed campus-based students in terms of grades. Clearly, issues related to access to campus-resident services and resources does not hinder the academic performance of the University's distance education students. How is it possible that distance from these services and resources has no impact on success? What actions and strategies do distance education students use to substitute for these services and resources?

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A Comparison Between On-Campus Students and Off-Campus Students to a Common Final Examination. (1996). Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University. Research and Planning Report 96-17.

A Comparison of Final Grades Awarded in Campus-Based Courses and Courses Offered Through Distance Education for Winter Term 1997. (1998). Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University. Research and Planning Report 98-10.

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Hogan, Robert. (1997). *Analysis of Student Success in Distance Learning Courses Compared to Traditional Courses*. ERIC ED 412992.

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APPENDIX:

Tables 1 to 4

Table 1

Summary of Successful Grades (A, B, C, Pass) and All Other Grades by Place of Class Location and by Academic Center: Winter Term 1997

Academic Center	Successful Grades: A, B, C, Pass		All Other Grades		p	Results of Chi-Square Analysis
	Campus	Distance	Campus	Distance		
Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies	6,687	3,348	1,390	505	.001	Students enrolled in courses offered through distance education received a significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.
Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education	4,906	2,421	605	164	.001	Students enrolled in courses offered through distance education received a significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.
School of Business and Entrepreneurship	1,973	1,807	288	93	.001	Students enrolled in courses offered through distance education received a significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

Center for Psychological Studies . . .	1,609	499	90	46	.007	There is no difference in the frequency of successful grades awarded between students enrolled in courses offered through distance education and students who are campus-based.
All Four Academic Centers with Both Campus-Based Courses and Distance Education Courses	15,175	8,075	2,373	808	.001	Students enrolled in courses offered through distance education received a significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

Table 2.A

Summary of Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: All Standard Courses in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	1,967	31	2,233	35	935	15	114	2	5,249	82	1,180	18	6,429
Miami-Dade County	726	44	544	33	168	10	0	0	1,438	87	210	13	1,648
Subtotal	2,693	33	2,777	34	1,103	14	114	1	6,687	83	1,390	17	8,077
Distance Education													
Subtotal	1,574	41	1,375	36	398	10	1	0	3,348	87	505	13	3,853
TOTAL	4,267	36	4,152	35	1,501	13	115	1	10,035	84	1,895	16	11,930

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 32.86 and the Null Hypothesis is rejected ($p = .001$). Students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education received a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

Table 2.B

Summary of Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: All Standard Courses in the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	2,595	60	948	22	96	2	141	3	3,780	88	526	12	4,306
Miami-Dade County	801	66	256	21	12	1	57	5	1,126	93	79	7	1,205
Subtotal	3,396	62	1,204	22	108	2	198	4	4,906	89	605	11	5,511
Distance Education													
Subtotal	1,462	57	264	10	12	0	683	26	2,421	94	164	6	2,585
TOTAL	4,858	60	1,468	18	120	1	881	11	7,327	91	769	9	8,096

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 43.95 and the Null Hypothesis is rejected ($p = .001$). Students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education received a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

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Table 2.C

Summary of Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: All Standard Courses in the School of Business and Entrepreneurship

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	806	41	524	27	72	4	276	14	1,678	86	270	14	1,948
Miami-Dade County	136	43	78	25	6	2	75	24	295	94	18	6	313
Subtotal	942	42	602	27	78	3	351	16	1,973	87	288	13	2,261
Distance Education													
Subtotal	1,018	54	656	35	39	2	94	5	1,807	95	93	5	1,900
TOTAL	1,960	47	1,258	30	117	3	445	11	3,780	91	381	9	4,161

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 76.35 and the Null Hypothesis is rejected ($p = .001$). Students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education received a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

Table 2.D

Summary of Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: All Standard Courses in the Center for Psychological Studies

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	1,120	69	336	21	18	1	68	4	1,542	95	88	5	1,630
Miami-Dade County	45	65	17	25	5	7	0	0	67	97	2	3	69
Subtotal	1,165	69	353	21	23	1	68	4	1,609	95	90	5	1,699
Distance Education													
Subtotal	359	66	131	24	9	2	0	0	499	92	46	8	545
TOTAL	1,524	68	484	22	32	1	68	3	2,108	94	136	6	2,244

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 7.16 and the Null Hypothesis is accepted ($p = .007$).

Table 2.E

Summary of Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: Standard Courses in All Academic Centers Using Distance Education Modalities

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	6,488	45	4,041	28	1,121	8	599	4	12,249	86	2,064	14	14,313
Miami-Dade County	1,708	53	895	28	191	6	132	4	2,926	90	309	10	3,235
Subtotal	8,196	47	4,936	28	1,312	7	731	4	15,175	86	2,373	14	17,548
Distance Education													
Subtotal	4,413	50	2,426	27	458	5	778	9	8,075	91	808	9	8,883
TOTAL	12,609	48	7,362	28	1,770	7	1,509	6	23,250	88	3,181	12	26,431

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 109.17 and the Null Hypothesis is rejected ($p = .001$). Students enrolled in courses offered through the use of distance education received a statistically significantly greater frequency of successful grades than their campus-based counterparts.

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Table 3.A

Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: Courses Taught by Faculty in the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies Who Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	85	33	102	40	37	14	0	0	224	87	34	13	258
Miami-Dade County	25	47	18	34	4	8	0	0	47	89	6	11	53
Subtotal	110	35	120	39	41	13	0	0	271	87	40	13	311
Distance Education													
Subtotal	71	29	88	35	43	17	0	0	202	81	46	19	248
TOTAL	181	32	208	37	84	15	0	0	473	85	86	15	559

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 3.43 and the Null Hypothesis is accepted ($p = .064$).

Table 3.B

Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: Courses Taught by Faculty in the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services Who Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	77	63	21	17	4	3	10	8	112	91	11	9	123
Miami-Dade County	12	92	1	8	0	0	0	0	13	100	0	0	13
Subtotal	89	65	22	16	4	3	10	7	125	92	11	8	136
Distance Education													
Subtotal	30	58	6	12	1	2	12	23	49	94	3	6	52
TOTAL	119	63	28	15	5	3	22	12	174	93	14	7	188

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 0.29 and the Null Hypothesis is accepted ($p = .588$).

Table 3.C

Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: Courses Taught by Faculty in the School of Business and Entrepreneurship Who Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	18	49	18	49	0	0	0	0	36	97	1	3	37
Miami-Dade County	16	94	1	6	0	0	0	0	17	100	0	0	17
Subtotal	34	63	19	35	0	0	0	0	53	98	1	2	54
Distance Education													
Subtotal	67	55	53	43	0	0	0	0	120	98	2	2	122
TOTAL	101	57	72	41	0	0	0	0	173	98	3	2	176

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 0.01 and the Null Hypothesis is accepted ($p = .920$).

Table 3.D

Winter Term 1997 Grades by Place of Class Location: Courses Taught by Faculty in the Center for Psychological Studies Who Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students

	Successful Grades												
	A		B		C		Pass		Subtotal		All Other Grades		Total
Faculty Status	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Campus-Based Instruction													
Broward County	44	59	25	34	0	0	0	0	69	93	5	7	74
Miami-Dade County	15	94	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	94	1	6	16
Subtotal	59	66	25	28	0	0	0	0	84	93	6	7	90
Distance Education													
Subtotal	50	58	29	34	0	0	0	0	79	92	7	8	86
TOTAL	109	62	54	31	0	0	0	0	163	93	13	7	176

Null Hypothesis: There is no statistically significant difference between campus-based courses and distance education courses regarding the frequency of successful grades and all other grades awarded ($p \leq .001$).

Finding: Chi-square = 0.139 and the Null Hypothesis is accepted ($p = .709$).

Table 4

Comparison of Successful Grades in Courses Taught by Faculty Who Concurrently Taught the Same Course to Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students

Academic Center and Courses	Chi-Square	p	Significant difference at $p \leq .05$
Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies			
BUSS3020 BUSS3050 BUSS3100 BUSS4100 BUSS4610 BUSS4880 BUSS4990 EDUC4120 ELEM3310 FINC2130 HMGT3820 MGMT1410 MGMT2510 MGMT3070 MGMT4160 PSYC1410 PSYC3070	3.42	.064	No Distance Education = Campus-Based
Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services			
BLE 0500 EDL 0505 EDL 0530 EDUC0688 EL 0600 ELE 0602 EP 0566 EP 5415	0.29	.588	No Distance Education = Campus-Based

School of Business and Entrepreneurship

GMP 5015 GMP 5070 GMP 5090	. . . . .	0.01	0.920	No	Distance Education	=	Campus-Based

Center for Psychological Studies

PSY 0506 PSY 0635 PSY 0645 PSY 0675	. . . . .	0.14	0.709	No	Distance Education	=	Campus-Based

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